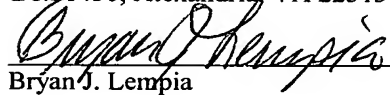


JOINT INVENTORS

"EXPRESS MAIL" mailing label
No. EV 323 764 092 US.
Date of Deposit: February 5, 2004
I hereby certify that this paper (or fee) is being
deposited with the United States Postal Service
"EXPRESS MAIL POST OFFICE TO
ADDRESSEE" service under 37 CFR §1.10 on the
date indicated above and is addressed to: Mail Stop
Patent Application, Commissioner for Patents, P.O.
Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450


Bryan J. Lempia

APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT SPECIFICATION

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Be it known that we, David R. Sander, a citizen of United States, residing at 925 Patriots Way, Medina 44256 in the State of Ohio, Todd Huthmaker, a citizen of United States, residing at 3783 Friendsville Rd., Wooster 44691 in the State of Ohio, and Cris Beilstein, a citizen of United States, residing at 2812 Eastwood Dr., Wooster 44691 in the State of Ohio, have invented a new and useful **Storage Caddie Accessory**, of which the following is a specification.

Bryan J. Lempia
Reg. No. 39,746
MARSHALL, GERSTEIN & BORUN LLP
6300 Sears Tower
233 South Wacker Drive
Chicago, Illinois 60606-6357
(312) 474-6300

STORAGE CADDIE ACCESSORY

Related Application Data

[0001] This patent is related to, claims priority from, and incorporates herein by reference co-pending U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial Nos. 60/445,009, which was filed on February 5, 2003, and 60/459,345, which was filed on April 1, 2003.

Background of the Invention

1. Field of the Disclosure

[0002] The present disclosure is generally directed to storage of articles, and more particularly to storage caddies for use as an accessory to other containers.

2. Description of Related Art

[0003] Storage caddies for placement on objects are known. For example, tool caddies are known that attach to buckets so that an individual can carry a plurality of their tools from location to location while working on projects. A typical tool caddy attaches to an exterior surface of the bucket and provides multiple pockets for storing tools and accessories. The interior of the bucket remains open for storage of additional articles.

[0004] Additionally, organizer products such as caddies have been devised for automotive usage, and particularly for holding and retaining articles so that they do not fly around a moving vehicle. One such storage accessory attaches to a rear side of an automotive seat and provides one or more storage pockets therein.

[0005] U.S. Patent No. 4,981,232 discloses a laundry basket divider for positioning within a laundry basket interior. The divider can be used for separating different clothing items or classes of clothing within the basket. However, the divider takes up space within the basket interior and, thus, leaves less room for storing or holding clothing items therein. Also, a laundry basket and its interior, when prepared for a trip to a Laundromat, are typically filled with dirty laundry and with any detergent, loose change for the machines, fabric softener, reading or entertainment materials, and the like. However, loading the non-clothing items in the basket takes up valuable space for such clothing items, and makes it more difficult to retrieve the items after mingling with the clothing.

[0006] Soft-sided and insulated bags are known and have interiors for storing items therein in order to keep them cool. Some of these soft-sided containers also have exterior pockets

useful to organize smaller items carried with the bag or container. However, such containers lack the cooling performance and the durability of hard sided coolers, such as plastic or metal coolers. Hard-sided coolers are not known to have any supplemental storage space, other than the interior cooling space of the cooler. Again, the interior cooling space can be broken up by dividers, suspended shelves, and the like. However, no additional storage space is known for such coolers.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0007] Objects, features, and advantages of the present invention will become apparent upon reading the following description in conjunction with the drawing figures, in which:

[0008] FIG. 1 shows a perspective view of one example of a storage caddy accessory for a laundry basket constructed in accordance with the teachings of the present invention.

[0009] FIG. 2 shows a side view of the storage caddy accessory of FIG. 1 installed on a laundry basket, the basket being shown in cross section.

[0010] FIG. 3 shows a side view of another example of a storage caddy accessory for a laundry basket constructed in accordance with the teachings of the present invention.

[0011] FIG. 4 shows a perspective view of another example of a storage caddy accessory for a laundry basket constructed in accordance with the teachings of the present invention.

[0012] FIGS. 5A-5C show a number of examples of optional attachment devices and arrangements for securing the storage caddy shown in FIG. 4 to the laundry basket.

[0013] FIG. 6 shows a perspective view of another example of a storage caddy accessory for a laundry basket constructed in accordance with the teachings of the present invention

[0014] FIG. 7 shows the storage caddy accessory of FIG. 6 mounted on a laundry basket.

[0015] FIG. 8 shows a front view of another example of a storage caddy accessory installed on a hard-sided cooler and constructed in accordance with the teachings of the present invention.

[0016] FIG. 9 shows an end perspective view of the cooler and storage caddy accessory of FIG. 8.

[0017] FIG. 10 shows a rear view of the cooler and storage caddy accessory of FIG. 8.

[0018] FIG. 11 shows a perspective view of another example of a storage caddie accessory installed on a hard-sided cooler jug and constructed in accordance with the teachings of the present invention.

[0019] FIG. 12 shows a bottom perspective view of the cooler and caddie of FIG. 11.

[0020] FIG. 13 shows a top perspective view of another example of a storage caddie accessory on a hard-sided cooler and constructed in accordance with the teachings of the present invention.

[0021] FIG. 14 shows a front view of the cooler and caddie of FIG. 13 with a top flap of the caddie in an open position.

[0022] FIG. 15 shows a bottom perspective view of another example of a storage caddie accessory on a hard-sided cooler and constructed in accordance with the teachings of the present invention.

Detailed Description of the Disclosure

[0023] The present invention is generally directed to storage caddie accessories for attachment to exterior surfaces of container-type items. Examples of storage caddies are disclosed herein for use with laundry baskets. Other examples of storage caddies are disclosed herein for use with hard-sided coolers. The storage caddies easily attach to the exterior of the container and can provide additional storage space on the exterior surfaces of these containers, as well as other optional features described herein.

[0024] Referring now to the drawings, FIGS. 1 and 2 illustrate one example of a storage caddie accessory 20 adapted for use with a laundry basket. In this example, the storage caddie 20 has a closed bottom 21, a contiguous side wall 22 extending upward from a perimeter of the closed bottom, and a rim 24 extending radially outward from an upper end of the wall 22. A front wall section 26 of the side wall 22 is shorter than a rear wall section 28 in order to provide easy access into a storage receptacle 30 defined within the boundary of the closed bottom and the side wall.

[0025] A hook tab 32 is spaced rearward from and depends downward generally parallel to the rear wall section 28 from an edge of the rim 24. A gap 34 is thus defined between the hook tab 32 and the rear wall section 28. The tab length, width, and shape and the gap size are configured to receive a basket rim 36 of a laundry basket 38 between the hook tab and the rear wall section and to support the caddie 20 on the basket. As illustrated in FIG. 2, the

caddie 20 hooks onto and hangs from the basket rim 36 adjacent an exterior wall surface 40 of the basket 38. The storage receptacle 30 provides a supplemental storage space that is exterior to a basket interior 42. Therefore, the storage receptacle 30 provides additional storage space for laundry items without interfering with the size or usefulness of the laundry basket interior 42. The caddie 20 also provides a hands-free means of transporting sundry items for doing laundry.

[0026] In this example, the storage caddie 20 is formed of a relatively rigid, durable plastic material. The caddie 20 is in the form of a bucket or tub that can hold relatively heavy and large items such as a bottle of laundry detergent, loose change, fabric softener, and the like, and yet retain its shape while suspended from the laundry basket rim 36. The caddie 20 can be formed from virtually any suitable plastic material as well as other substantially rigid materials as long as it performs its intended purpose and retains its overall general shape. For example, the caddie 20 can be fabricated from polypropylene, polyethylene, polystyrene, or the like as desired.

[0027] FIG. 3 illustrates a side view of another example of a substantially rigid storage caddie accessory 50 that is substantially similar in construction to the caddie 20. However, the caddie 50 has a side wall 51 with a front wall section 52 that is of substantially the same height as its rear wall section 54. A closed bottom 56 defines a storage receptacle 58 bounded by the side wall 51. The caddie 50 operates in essentially the same manner as the caddie 20. When not in use, the caddies 20 and 50 can be stored inside the basket 38 or can be suspended from the laundry basket rim 36 such that the tab extends to the exterior of the basket and the storage receptacle 30 is positioned in the interior of the laundry basket. The caddies 20 and 50 can also be used in this manner if desired.

[0028] FIG. 4 illustrates one example of a soft wrap storage caddie accessory 60 also adapted for use with and coupled to a laundry basket 61. The soft wrap storage caddie 60 in this example includes a backing or base panel 62 of a flexible material. In one example, the base panel 62 can be formed from a woven fabric, a vinyl material, a nylon or synthetic material, or other similar types of flexible materials. In this example, the soft wrap is sewn so the material of the base panel 62 is suitable to accommodate and withstand sewing operations and assembly.

[0029] The soft wrap storage caddie 60 in this example includes a second or outer panel 64 of a flexible material. The outer panel in this example is sewn to a utility or front surface 66

of the base panel 62. The bottom edge 68 and two opposed side edges 70 of the base and outer panels are attached to one another in this example. The outer panel 64 is also intermittently secured to the base panel 62 along vertical joints 72 forming individual discrete pockets or receptacles 73 between the base panel 62 and outer panel 64. The top edge 74 of the outer panel is not sewn or otherwise attached to the base panel in this example, leaving top openings into each of the pockets 73. Closure means such as flaps, button, zippers, hook and loop fasteners, and/or snaps can be provided to selectively close and secure the open tops of the pockets, if desired.

[0030] In one example, the outer panel 64 is formed from a mesh material. A mesh material will provide a durable and yet light weight caddie construction and yet will permit a user to view the contents of a given pocket 73. However, the outer panel construction, as well as the base panel, are not intended to be limited to any particular material selection. In another example, the outer panel 64 can be formed as a hybrid of two or more layers. The lower part of the outer panel can be formed as one durable, non-mesh material to provide the pockets 73 with durable bottoms that hold all items within the pocket. The upper part of the outer panel can be fabricated from mesh.

[0031] In the disclosed example, the soft wrap storage caddie 60 extends only part way around a perimeter of an exterior surface of a side wall 76 of the laundry basket 61. In another example, though not shown, the soft wrap storage caddie 60 can be constructed to extend around less of, more of, or the entirety of the circumference of the basket, if desired. The size of the soft wrap caddie 60 can be designed to provide any number and/or a variety of different sized storage receptacles. The height of the soft wrap caddie 60 in this example is substantially the same as the height of the side wall 76 of the basket 61 or its exterior surface. However, the height of the caddie 60 can also vary without departing from the scope of the invention.

[0032] The soft wrap storage caddie 60 can be secured to the laundry basket 61 in any suitable manner. FIGS. 5A-5C depict only several of many possible attachment options. The top edge 74 of the base panel 62 can be provided with a plurality of intermittently spaced apart attachment devices. For example, FIG. 5A shows an example of an attachment device in the form of a string tie down 78. A pair of string segments 80 are attached to and extend from the base panel 62. As shown in FIG. 4, the laundry basket 61 has handle openings 82 through its side wall 76. Also, the basket 61 typically has a plurality of perforations 84 through the side wall 76. The basket also has a rim 86 extending around the perimeter of the

basket at an upper end of the side wall 76. The string segments can be looped through any one of the handle openings 82 or perforations 84 and, if desired, looped over the rim 86, and tied together to suspend the soft wrap from the basket side wall.

[0033] As shown in FIG. 5B, a pair of straps 88 can be sewn to or otherwise attached to the base panel 62. A distal end of each strap can be provided with one part of a two part fastener. The straps can be looped through handle openings 82 or perforations 84 and/or looped over the rim 86 of the basket and the distal ends secured together. In one example shown in FIG. 5B, the two part fastener can be a hook and loop fastener 90, with a hook part 91 carried on one of the straps and a loop part 92 carried on the other strap. However, the two part fastener can be a snap configuration, a button and button hole structure or the like.

[0034] FIG. 5C illustrates another attachment device example wherein a plurality of hooks 94 are secured to a back surface of the base panel 62. In this example, the hooks can be configured to hook over the rim 86 of the basket to suspend the soft wrap caddy directly from the rim. Alternatively, as depicted in FIG. 5C, hook openings 96 can be provided in the rim 86 specifically for receiving soft wrap caddy hooks 94 therein. The basket could be provided with specific openings 96 positioned about the basket rim 86 particularly for mating with a given soft wrap caddy construction. Alternatively, the rim 86 could be provided with a large number of periodically spaced openings 96 to accommodate a variety of caddies or a variety of mounting locations for a caddy. As another alternative, the hooks 94 can be adapted to secure directly to an existing handle opening 82 or a basket perforation 84.

[0035] As will be evident to those having ordinary skill in the art, the openings 96, if provided, can be used for other attachment devices such as the string tie down 78, the straps 88, or other types of fasteners such as plastic tie downs or the like. Additionally, the examples described herein for securing the soft wrap caddy to the laundry basket are not intended to be exhaustive, but instead only to exemplify the variety of possible options.

[0036] Turning now to FIG. 6, another alternative embodiment of a laundry basket storage caddy accessory 100 is illustrated. The storage caddy 100 has an elongate base panel 102. In this example, the base panel 102 is formed from a relatively flexible, soft, and yet somewhat heavy rubber or elastomer material. However, other materials can be just as easily used for the base panel. The base panel 102 has a utility surface 104, a pair of opposed end edges 106, and a pair of elongate side edges 108.

[0037] A pair of outer panels 110 are adhered to the utility surface 104, one each near each end edge 106. Each outer panel 110 has a bottom edge adhered to the utility surface 104 adjacent its respective base panel end edge 106. Each outer panel 110 also has a pair of opposed side edges adhered to the utility surface adjacent a fraction of the each of the respective base panel side edges 108. Each outer panel 110 in this example has a top edge 112 facing the top edge of the other outer panel that is not adhered to the utility surface. Further, each outer panel is intermittently adhered along tack points 114 to the utility surface between the opposed side edges. The tack points 114 define a plurality of pockets or storage receptacles 115 between the base panel 102 and the outer panel 110. Each pocket can have an elastic band at its top opening to help secure items stored in the pocket.

[0038] An intermediate region 116 in the base panel 102 is defined between the top edges of two outer panels 110. As illustrated in FIG. 7, this intermediate region 116 is placed within an interior of a laundry basket 118 so that it rests against the bottom panel and the interior surfaces of the opposing side walls 120 of the basket. A portion of the base panel 102 drapes over a rim 122 of the laundry basket 118 exposing the pockets 115 to the exterior of the basket. As illustrated in FIG. 7, the top openings of the pockets 115 will face upward on each side of the basket providing access to the pocket interiors. Thus, accessory storage receptacles are formed in these pockets on each side of the laundry basket.

[0039] The length of the base panel 102 should be such that it can lie flush against the basket interior surfaces so as not to usurp any laundry item space from within the basket. The width of the base panel 102 should be such that it fits between end walls 124 of the basket 118 so that the intermediate region can lie flush to the bottom of the basket across the entire width of the base panel 102.

[0040] The material of the outer panels 110 can again be selected from virtually any suitable material. In one example, the outer panels 110 are formed from a clear plastic material, such as transparent vinyl, that is flexible and permits visual inspection of the pocket contents. The material is also preferably durable so that the caddy can retain any items held within the pockets without failing, tearing, or separating from the base panel 102.

Alternatively, the outer panel can again be a mesh material sewn to a base panel 102 of a material such as fabric, nylon, vinyl, or the like. A rubber or elastomer material for the base panel 102 is quite suitable because it will be relatively heavy and easily stay seated against the interior surfaces of the laundry basket when installed. As a further alternative, though not shown, the caddy 100 can include only one outer panel 110, pockets 73 on only one side of

the basket 118, and only one flap part of the base panel 102 that drapes over or otherwise hangs onto the rim 122 and extends into the basket interior.

[0041] As a further alternative, if a fabric is used for the base panel 102, a heavier layer of fabric or multiple layers can be added to the intermediate region 116 to assist in keeping it flush against the surfaces of the laundry basket when the basket is not loaded with clothing, or when even a clothing load is light. In yet another alternative, the portions of the base panel that drape over the basket rim can include one or more securing devices to help hold the caddie in place on the basket if desired.

[0042] Turning now to FIGS. 8-10, one example of a soft wrap storage caddie accessory 130 for a hard-sided cooler 132 is shown. In all of the cooler examples described below, each cooler has a bottom wall, a side wall, a lid, and an interior storage space. For the sake of brevity, the cooler components and coolers are not separately shown and described herein. The soft wraps described herein cover the cooler parts and thus only the soft wraps and any uncovered or exposed cooler parts are shown in the drawings.

[0043] In this example, a base panel 133 is configured as a rectangular tube or skirt that fits over the exterior side and end walls of the cooler 132. The skirt or base panel 133 has a pair of opposed elongate side panels 134 and a pair of opposed end panels 136 that generally correspond with the cooler walls. The base panel skirt has an exterior facing utility surface 137, open bottom 138, and an open top 140. One or both of the end panels 136 can have an upward scallop 142 to provide clearance for and access to a cooler drain 144 of the cooler 132. In this example, each end panel 136 also has a pass through opening 146 to accommodate a corresponding handle 147 of the cooler. Thus, the handles can be fully accessible when the caddie is attached to the cooler.

[0044] One or more pockets 148 can be attached to one or more panels of the base panel utility surface 137. The pockets can be closable pockets with securing devices such as zippers 150 as shown. Alternatively, the pockets can be open topped pockets. The pockets can vary in height, width, depth, quantity, and location as desired for a particular cooler application. Additionally, one or more open cargo net spaces 152 can also be provided, if desired. The cargo net space 152 can be formed from a mesh material and have an elastic band 154 at the open top to help retain items within the cargo net space. In this example, one cargo net space 152 is positioned beneath a plurality of smaller pockets 148 on one elongate side panel 134.

[0045] The handle openings can rest upon the handles to assist in holding the base panel skirt in position on the cooler. Additionally, elastic straps 156 can be provided to extend over portions, such as the corners, of the cooler to hold the skirt or base panel 133 in place. Straps can also be provided to attach the base panel 133 to the handles or other portions of the cooler. Again, the materials used to form the soft wrap caddy 130 can vary. However, the caddy is preferably flexible so that it can be easily installed on the cooler.

[0046] In the example shown in FIGS. 8-10, the caddy 130 also has a lid cover portion 160 that fits snugly over a lid 162 of the cooler 132. In this example, the cooler lid has a plurality of cup holders recessed into the lid 162. To accommodate them, the cover portion 160 includes cup holder pockets, sleeves, or through openings 164 to either nest within the lid cup holders or to permit access through the lid portion 160 into the cup holders.

[0047] As shown in FIG. 10, the cover portion 160 has a flap 166 depending down from its rear edge. The flap 166 is attached to a similar flap 168 extending upward from a back edge of the base panel skirt 133. In this example, the flaps 166 and 168 are sewn together to form a hinge so that the cooler lid 162 can be opened without interfering with operation of the caddy accessory 130. To hold the cover 160 on the lid 162, an elastic band (not shown) can be sewn into the bottom perimeter 170 of a lid skirt 172. The band will pull the lid skirt 172 snugly around the corners of the lid 162 to secure the lid cover 160 in place. A gap between the lid skirt bottom perimeter 170, other than in the hinge region, and the upper edge of the base panel 133 can be left, as shown in FIG. 1 to permit access to a lid handle, latch, and/or grip 174 for opening the cooler lid.

[0048] FIGS. 11 and 12 illustrate another example of a soft wrap storage caddy accessory 180 for a round cylindrical cooler or water jug 182. This example of a caddy employs additional optional features that could be included on any of the previously described laundry basket or cooler caddies. In this example, a base panel 184 is a circular tube shaped skirt with a utility surface 186 and a bottom panel 188 secured to the lower edge of the skirt or base panel. The bottom panel 188 in this example includes a plurality of wheels 189 attached thereto for permitting the cooler jug to roll on a surface for easy transport. The bottom panel 188 can be reinforced for rigidity and stiffness if desired. The wheels 189 can be secured to the bottom panel and to its reinforcing layer in any suitable manner.

[0049] A shoulder strap 190 is attached to a portion of the base panel 184 so that, if desired, the soft wrap caddy 180 can be used to carry the cooler jug held therein. The

shoulder strap can also be extendable, adjustable, and/or long enough to be used as a pull handle to pull the cooler jug along on the wheels.

[0050] Also in this example, as shown in FIG. 11, the base panel has a vertically oriented zippered seam 192 permitting expansion of the base panel for installation on a cooler. The bottom panel can remain secured to the base panel over its entire circumference, but the seam 192 can permit the base panel to be opened. A lid cover portion 194 is also provided in this example for covering the lid of the cooler jug. The lid cover portion 194 is also attached to the top edge of the base panel 184 along a second zippered seam 196. The seam 196 can be zipped to hold the lid of the cooler in place, and can be unzipped to permit opening of and access to the lid.

[0051] As illustrated in FIGS. 11 and 12, the soft wrap caddy 180 can have handle openings 198, an access opening 200 for a cooler drain 202, and a plurality of pockets 204, cargo net spaces 206, and/or the like.

[0052] Turning now to FIGS. 13 and 14, additional optional features for a soft wrap caddy are illustrated. In FIG. 13, a cargo tie down strap 210 can be provided on top of the lid cover section 212 of a soft wrap caddy 214. The tie down can be coupled to the lid cover surface 216, be an elastic or non-elastic strap, and optionally adjustable, if desired. Additional cargo can be placed on the lid cover surface 216 beneath the strap 210 for additional storage space. In FIG. 14, a lid cover portion, such as the cover section 212, can have an additional zippered flap 218 covering an additional storage compartment 220 within the lid cover section. The flap can be unzipped to expose and access the compartment 220, and can be closed and zipped up to secure any items stored within the compartment.

[0053] Lastly, FIG. 15 illustrates another example of a soft wrap storage caddy accessory 230 for a hard-sided cooler 232 employing an adjustable shoulder strap 234 and a collapsible handle assembly 236. This caddy 230 also has a bottom panel 238 with a pair of wheels 239 depending from a back edge of the caddy. The handle 236 has a collapsible and extendable handle section 240 that can be collapsed into a fixed bracket portion 242 mounted to the back side of a base panel 244 of the caddy. The handle section 240 can be extended for pulling the caddy 230 and its cooler 232 along on the wheels 239. The handle section 240 can be collapsed into the bracket portion 242 when not being used. The adjustable length shoulder strap can be used to carry the caddy 230 and its cooler 232, if desired. The wheels and handle can be secured to the base panel of the caddy in any suitable manner, such as by

threaded fasteners, rivets, or the like. The wheels are located on a back edge of the cooler and bottom panel. A pair of feet 246 can be included along the front edge if desired to level the cooler when in a resting position.

[0054] All of the options disclosed for the soft wrap cooler caddies disclosed herein can also be employed on the laundry basket soft wrap caddies, if desired. The materials used to fabricate the cooler soft wrap caddies can also vary considerably and yet fall within the spirit and scope of the invention. The cooler wrap material is preferably relatively flexible so that the soft wrap caddies are easy to install and remove from the container or cooler. Multiple material layers can be used to form layers of pockets in anyone of the disclosed caddies.

[0055] Although certain storage caddie examples have been described herein in accordance with the teachings of the present disclosure, the scope of coverage of this patent is not limited thereto. On the contrary, this patent covers all embodiments of the teachings of the disclosure that fairly fall within the scope of permissible equivalents.